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Burkett, Elmer Jacob

Address of
Elmer J. Burkett...

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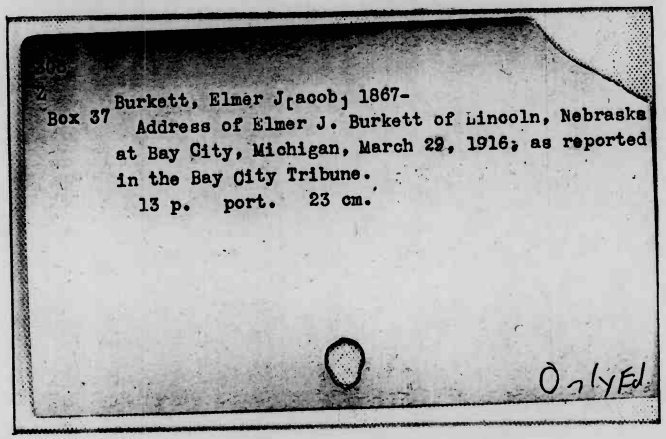
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Gift of the President

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Bay 37

ADDRESS OF

ELMER J. BURKETT OF LINCOLN, NEBRASKA.

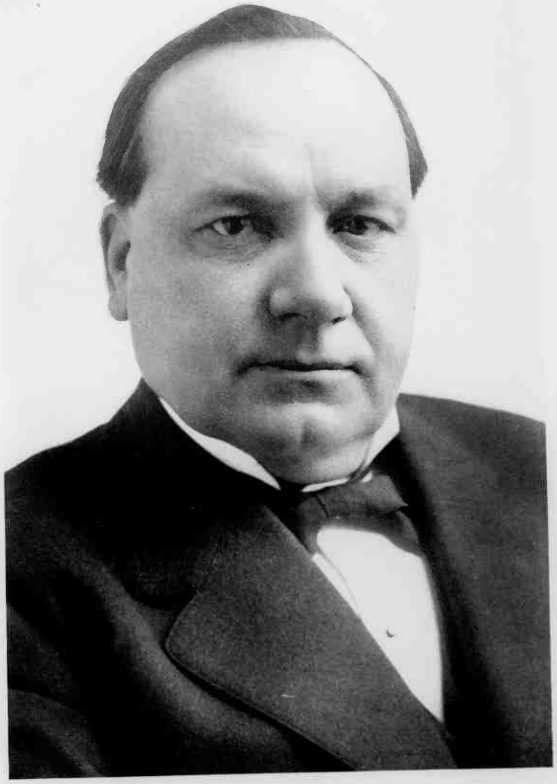
at

Bay City, Michigan,

March 29, 1916.

As Reported in the Bay City Tribune.

Gift of the President



ELMER J. BURKETT

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

May 11 Aug 16

M'KINLEY BANQUET AT ARMORY FEATURED BY STIRRING ADDRESSES

WILSON FOREIGN AND MEXICAN POLICY SCORED

Hon. Elmer J. Burkett Delivers Principal Address of Evening

Fine Musical Program Adds to the Enjoyment of the Occasion.

Branding the Wilson administration a failure, the handling of domestic affairs a disgrace, the attitude in the European situation weak and vacillating the Mexican policy vicious and an insult to the civilization of the world, ex-Senator Elmer J. Burkett, of Lincoln, Neb., and a Republican candidate for the nomination to the vice-presidency of the United States, in an inspiring

address at the McKinley club banquet last night voiced the spirit of the 1916 Republicanism to enthusiastic Republicans who thronged the National Guard armory.

Notables Present

The McKinley club banquet has passed into history but its passing carried with it the tribute of a rousing success. Every ticket was sold and every seat at the scores of tables was taken. The huge auditorium literally permeated patriotism. The stars and stripes swung everywhere, from the ceilings and from the walls. Screened in a mass of red, white and blue bunting, a 10-piece orchestra dispersed inspiring music, comprising mostly national airs. The speakers' table, located on the south side of the floor, sat upon an elevated platform banked in ferns and greenery.

At this table were seated Congressman George A. Loud, Congressman Tilson of Connecticut, Charles R. Wells, the Hon. Elmer J. Burkett and Rev. John R. Gregory.

Before introducing Mr. Burkett, Chairman Wells read telegrams from Senators William Alden Smith and Charles E. Townsend. Ex-Senator Burkett was given an ovation which lasted for nearly five minutes. In part Mr. Burkett said:

I am glad to come to Michigan and talk to your good people. There is a twilight zone in public affairs between narrow provincialism and unstable wunderlust, where the real substantiality of good government reigns, and it has always seemed to me that the public mind of Michigan occupied that very desirable zone. Your patriotism is the product of intelligence enough to know the right and courage enough to do it.

Parties Measured by What They do

Political parties are measured by what they do and not by what they can do or might do or want to do or talk about doing. A President must go up or down with

the success of his party handling public affairs. The fault may be his or it may be somebody's else, but the effect upon his candidacy will be the same. The people want results rather than excuses; they want achievement rather than explanations, and will not be overly exact in placing responsibility. The people in the coming campaign will not inquire whether Mr. Wilson has done the best he could, but whether Democracy has been a success. There will be no investigations by the people as to whether the President or Congress has been responsible for the shortcomings, but only the fact of the shortcomings will be taken into consideration. The people will not enter into any very prolonged discussion as to the good intentions of the Underwood tariff law, nor whether it is a protective tariff law or a revenue tariff measure; nor in fact will the people inquire who is responsible for it, for all this becomes unimportant so long as it neither protects American industries nor raises revenues enough to pay the running expenses of the government.

Democracy a Failure

The handling of our domestic affairs has been a failure, and our foreign affairs a humiliation and disgrace, while our conduct on Panama and the Phillippines has been so weak as to be pusillanimous, and so unfortunate as to be dangerous. The national treasury is empty, and the deficiency is growing day by day. On the 4th day of March, 1913, when President Wilson was inaugurated, there was a surplus in the general fund of the treasury turned over to his administration of $147,000,000. In six months from that time it was reduced to $123,000,000, and in one year it had been reduced to $92,000.000. In two years from the date of the inauguration of Mr. Wilson the amount in the treasury was a stand off between a surplus and a deficiency, and in three years we have a deficiency of $75,000,000 to $150,000,000. No explanation that the Democratic party can make can excuse them for that financial incompetency. Government expenditures

have been unduly and extravagantly multiplied. New offices have been created, salaries have been increased for insignificant and unimportant positions, consulships of a few hundred dollars of salary have been turned into diplomatic appointments at several thousand dollars a year salary. Experienced employees have been replaced with political appointees, while useless commissions and investigations have cost millions of dollars. There has never been in all the history of the country as much incompetency shown in managing the financial affairs of the government as during the present administration. For the people and the country there is but one course to pursue, and that is to completely renounce the incompetent, weak and vacillating policy that has characterized Democracy in our domestic and foreign affairs, and return to the strong, aggressive American policies that are now and always have been promulgated by the Republican party.

Republicanism in 1916

Republicanism in 1916 means, as it has always meant, the happiness and prosperity of the American people, the progress and development of the American Republic. It means the rejuvenation of business along substantial and permanent lines, the undoing of the unfortunate mistakes of Democracy at home and abroad. It means a return to a legitimate, businesslike administration of public affairs by putting our expenditures within our income by the elimination of a lot of fancy and useless positions filled by a lot of hungry and incompetent politicians. It means a return to the policy of general legislation for the whole country instead of special legislation for only a part of it. It means the protection of American industries and American labor and the restoration of the American flag to that proud eminence in international affairs from which it has fallen during the last three years.

Instability of President Wilson

The President has been unfortunate, perhaps, in having no well defined landmarks of public policy by which to steer his official course. His mind, or rather his opinions, seem to have shifted almost as the proverbial sands of the sea upon most of the important questions that have confronted him since he became President. Few men have questioned his good intentions, but most men have regretted his fickleness of action. He has been prolific in the promulgation of ideas, but rather unsuccessful in putting them into operation. His administration has been lacking in that continuity of purpose that is essential in a successful President. His vacillating conduct has brought to him not only the criticism of Republicans but a want of confidence from his own party. He has lost two members of his own cabinet because he has shuffled and wabbled about until he left those two distinguished gentlemen marooned in a wilderness of uncertainty ten miles from shore. Three Democratic members of congress, Mr. Page of North Carolina, Mr. Eagle of Texas, and Mr. Sherwood of Ohio, have refused to stand for reelection because of their inability to keep step with the devious and uncertain pedestrianism of their versatile and somewhat vacillating President. Mr. Bryan may not be a success as a presidential candidate, but no man will accuse him of being unable to tell when the Democratic boat is leaking, nor of hesitating to jump overboard when the danger point is reached. Mr. Bryan had gone through one Democratic bankruptcy proceeding and did not propose enduring the discomforts and humiliation of another one, and no man was in a better position than Mr. Bryan to see the instability and shifting tendencies of the present Democratic administration. From a position of supreme satisfaction with our scheme of preparedness and with an abiding confidence in the perpetuity of American peace, with a lachrymose apprehension of militarian, our "watchful, waiting" President experiencing by degrees and in order apparently all the powerful emotions of

alarm, fear, terror and dread, has shifted his mental operations from preparedness to better preparedness, and from uncertainty to threatened war, until he demands of the American people "the greatest navy in the world." After recommending to congress the plan of an army outlined by the Secretary of War he shifted his course and left poor Garrison stranded on a sandbar. It is that instability of purpose that has brought to Mr. Wilson a just criticism of the American people. He has been without landmarks and without well defined purposes. Only a few months ago he was sure we ought to have free sugar for the benefit of the consumer and as a mild reprimand to the sugar trust, but a bankrupt treasury, the ghost that ever stalks the graveyard of Democratic administrations, has persuaded him that free sugar will not materially benefit the consumer and may be unduly harsh to the infant sugar industry. When he was nominated for President, and as far as I know, when he was elected, he thought that American ships should have an advantage over foreign ships by way of tolls in the Panama Canal—but six months of time and perhaps other considerations changed his mind and he forced through congress a repeal of the free ship law for American vessels as one of the first of his paternal activities. He signed the law destroying the tariff commission—that body of experts that had for its very laudable purpose the taking of tariff schedules out of politics and making it a business proposition only—But after a couple of years of demonstration of Democratic incompetency to make tariff schedules he is persauded that there should be a tariff commission. When he was nominated he solemnly, deliberately and in writing declared for a single term for presidents, but more recent events in his conduct would seem to indicate that he had really shifted his position upon that proposition. As a citizen of Nebraska—and somewhat attached personally as most of us Nebraskans are, to our distinguished fellow citizen—who has thrice thrust the crown—of political ascendancy—into the junk pile—I remember of reading with something of consternation and chagrin a few years ago the outburst of Mr. Wilson's combative and pugilistic temperament, when in that rather commonplace display of his ready and violent English he proposed to "knock our own Mr. Bryan into a cocked hat." I never knew just what he meant—but I know it was something terrible—for we Republicans had done about the worst that we knew how to Mr. Bryan—and yet it did not satisfy the venom of Woodrow Wilson. But his mind shifted, and instead of becoming a "cocked hat" Mr. Bryan was called to a seat on the right hand of power, invested with authority; and given the insignia thereof—the great seal of America—a frock coat and a silk hat. When we people of Nebraska saw the form of our great Commoner arrayed in all his glory, as the newspapers pictured him, with a silk hat and a cane, a Prince Albert coat and a bottle of grape juice, we said: "Thank God harmony and war shall be no more."

Foreign Affairs

In the dream of foreign affairs the most ardent defender of the administration can hardly be proud of the part America has played. The most that can be said is that the President has done the best he could, but that best is all too bad. In the mighty crisis that holds the world in its grip we have been weak and vacillating, with neither apparent conception of our rights nor sufficient appreciation of our responsibilities. We have drifted from one position to another until we have shaken our security and confidence at home and have sacrificed our influence and respect abroad. The virile and vigorous diplomacy of Blaine and Hay and Knox and Root has passed away, and with it has gone the old time respect and dignity and power. We have merited and won the distrust, if not the disrespect, of every other nation on earth by our uncertain, undefined and indefinable attitude. We have been languid where we should have been adamantine, and have dawdled where we should have been resistless. We have been still when we should have spoken,

and humble when we should have been confident. We have asserted our rights and renounced our expectation of their recognition, we have written notes of conciliation when we should have been penning the mighty decrees of international justice. We have meddled everywhere until the President tells us, "the world is afire all about us." We have been "too proud to fight" and too unwise to keep still about it. We have seen our commerce stopped, our mail censored, our citizens drowned, our flag insulted, and our country invaded, with nothing more than grape juice protest, which Mr. Bryan said was only for home consumption. We have interpreted our own lack of sincerity, and have hamstrung our authority with our own imbecility. We have proclaimed our virtues from the housetop, and permitted our citizens to be slaughtered and our neutrality to be outraged.

Mexico

If our conduct in Europe has been pusillanimous our attitude in Mexico has been vicious. What we have done in Mexico is without a single redeeming feature, and its record is a story of cowardice and disgrace. We have sacrificed our national honor and traduced our history by our namby pamby, cruel and heartless attitude, and have displayed a weakness of unconcern for human suffering that has never been known in this country before under any administration. We have permitted humanity to starve at our own door, and to be murdered in our own dooryard, and we have been told that it is none of our affair. Our own citizens have been slaughtered, our own flag has been insulted, our national honor has been traduced, and through it all we are told that it is simply the evolution of civilization. The President said we must keep our hands off of Mexico, and permit the people to work out their own salvation. To my mind that is the most ignoble and indefensible position that could possibly have been taken. That may mean the entire destruction of the people of Mexico, and harks back to the barbarism of the

Dark Ages, but has no place in twentieth century Americanism. Never before since the dawn of civilization has the strong refused to help the weak or to fly to the relief of the incompetent. Civilized men will not stand by a dog fight until extermination without intervention. But bad as the doctrine is, it would have been infinitely better if kept in good faith than to have been broken in perfidy. There has not been a minute since President Wilson was inaugerated that the United States has not been interfering with this ethical "working out process" that the President announced must be permitted to go on. From the time that this country refused to recognize Huerta on moral grounds until he imprisoned him on political grounds, there has been a constant interference with this "working out process" in Mexico. From the time we demanded a salutation of our flag and landed our troops to enforce it until the brigands shot a hole in that flag at Columbus, there has been repeated interference on our part with this "working out process." When we refused to recognize the Huerta government after most all the other nations had done so we took sides in Mexico and we did it for that purpose, and therefore interfered with this "working out process." When the President sent his personal emissary to Mexico to negotiate with Carranza and the other rebellious leaders I have no doubt that he was interfering in that "working out process"—although we have never been able to find out just what John Lind went for nor what he accomplished when he got there. So far as I am concerned I have never understood by what authority the President sent John Lind to Mexico and Colonel House to Europe, nor by what authority Secretary Bryan sent his personal representative to negotiate with the bandit Villa. I have not only doubted the authority but the wisdom of the thing as well. I prefer that the public business shall be done by the regular government agencies sworn to do their duty and amenable to the people for a report of their doings. If our diplomatic and consular service is

not supplied with men capable of transacting our international affairs then the fault is with this administration that has made their appointments, and the power is with it to recall them.

But a distinguished U. S. Senator in his defense of the policy that has been pursued in Mexico with fear and trembling apologetically asks what else could have been done. Let old "By the eternal" Jackson answer if our modern Democrats have lost their courage of right and justice. "But," said the Senator, "to have interfered meant war, and war meant sacrifice and bloodshed." But the American people know that the wishy washy, miserable and contemptible things that we have done have been worse than war and bloodshed—a living disgrace. When has America ceased to owe duty to civilization? Whenever have American citizens shrunk from that responsibility? "Watchful waiting" was but temporizing with sin, and only prolonged the agony. Better a thousand times war than to have been responsible only passively for what has transpired in Mexico during the last three years. But war has come, bloodshed has come, and troubles in Mexico are not yet ended. Our responsibility is not yet ended, and it will not end until barbarism has ended in Mexico. We sent our armies to Cuba and to the Philippines to relieve those island people from a tyranny and oppression much less repulsive than the people of Mexico have undergone for the last three years, and in doing it we became a world power upon the merit of the undertaking. Why have we turned back the splendid page we wrote then and there in Manila Bay and on San Juan Hill? The United States did not need to intervene between the factional leaders in Mexico — usurpers all of the people's throne—but rather between the avarice and amitions and banditism of a few self crowned kings and the great unnumbered millions struggling and downtrodden masses. Our army planted on the borders of Mexico three years ago with an emphatic notice that head hunting must stop, that order must prevail, that the

mandates of civilization must control, and that petty and inordinate ambitions must hide their contentious heads, would have been like a well directed blow to a drunken man, and would have awakened poor, devastated and superstitious old Mexico. I doubt if it had ever been necessary to have marched a single American soldier across the border line, for it would have concentrated the forces of Mexico, and a united Mexico is the first long step towards bringing order out of chaos. But, instead of producing an irritation to combine their forces we applied a soothing lotion to scatter them, and we are now undoing the effects of what we permitted to be done—assaulting the anarchy that spread while we were "watchfully waiting." The times called for a mind of decision and a hand of action, and we have had neither.

Hauling Down the Flag

The Democratic party is doing in the Philippines today exactly what they did twenty years ago in Hawaii —hauling down the American flag. It was disgraceful then, and it is disgraceful now. In it there is displayed a lack of moral courage that does not belong in America. The American people condemned them for it then, and in my opinion they will hang them for it now. To take down the flag now means the same situation in those islands politically as exists in Mexico today, and as existed in Hawaii twenty years ago. It means bitter tribal wars for supremacy and unto complete extermination. Grover Cleveland recognized Queen Lilliakalini and placed her on the throne just as President Wilson has endeavored to put Carranza and Villa in power in Mexico. It did not stop internal strife in Hawaii then; it has not stopped it in Mexico now. The first act of William McKinley as President was to break aloof from every entangling alliance in Hawaii, restore the American flag, and with it peace and order. The Democrats will not learn by experience but keep on year after year making the same old foolish mistakes in the same old foolish

way. The only excuse they offer is that it is an added responsibility in peace and an encumbrance in war—and Democrats do not like responsibilities. Whether it would be an encumbrance in war I do not know—expert opinion seems to differ upon that point—but of one thing I am certain, it would not be more difficult to defend the entire island when we are in entire possession and control than to defend a few square miles of coaling station when somebody else is in entire control of the island. I have never permitted my mind to be worried over the proposition of whether Dewey made a mistake in not sailing away after he had reduced the Spanish fleet on that May morning in 1898, but I have been sure that there has been no time since when we could with decency have sailed away. I have never speculated much as to whether our presence in the Philippines is accidental or providential, nor whether the Philippines are to us a liability or an asset —for I know that our going was courageous and honorable, and that our coming away at any time since would be cowardly and dishonorable. In the name of our brave boys who fought and fell over there I would not come away and leave those people helpless before the same tyranny from which our boys sacrificed to relieve them. In the memory of our other boys and girls who went as teachers and missionaries I would not leave their work incomplete.

Preparedness

In the matter of preparedness of which another has spoken to you in great detail, I shall only add that Democracy can take no credit by the eleventh hour frenzy with which the President made his recent trip over the country. If we are remiss in this particular Democracy is doubly so, for in all the addresses which he made calling upon the country to rally to his support for a larger army and navy the President nowhere explained why ships that had been authorized three years had not been started, and why 68 or 69 vessels were dragging through a slow construction, to correct which the administration had done nothing. If the President did not get as much encouragement on that trip as he hoped to have he must not lay it up against the people's lack of patriotism or their lack of concern, but rather to his own uncertain stand and shifting position, and because of which he has forfeited the confidence of the people as a leader. The people are for all necessary and proper preparedness, but the President must not complain if they do not readily stand by him when he has been so uncertain as to where he himself stood.

Harmony of Action

In speaking to you tonight I realize that there are those here who four years ago broke away from the moorings of a lifetime of Republican associations and voted the progressive ticket. I would be a poor, miserable American citizen to question the motive that determined your conduct. We shall not inquire why you went nor why you come now—nor if you went and come—or we went and come—for it is sufficient that we are now here together. Whatever either of us may think *now* of what either of us did *then* with respect to the party affiliations of either of us, I am sure that all of us have regretted that either of us contributed to that political catastrophe of Democratic triumph in 1912. But we have gone too fast and too far in this country in four years to stop for post mortems over accidents that happened four years ago. We are here as men of the 1916 model and considering problems that pertain to 1916 conditions. We who disapprove of the Democratic failure and who do not have confidence to believe that Democratic policies will do better in the future than they have in the past must bind ourselves together this year to overthrow them.

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